In the Claims

Please replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application with the following list of claims:

1.   (Currently Amended) A method for sorting a plurality of items, to each of which a sequence number is assigned, into a predetermined sorted sequence using a plurality of sorting regions, including for each sort, at least two initial sorting regions, and at least two additional sorting regions, at least one of the additional sorting regions functioning as a return region, the items being initially located, in an unsorted order, in the at least two initial sorting regions, the method comprising the acts of:

sorting the items in each of the at least two initial sorting regions into at least one intermediary sorted set, in which the items are in a sorted order, by moving at least some of the items in at least one of the initial sorting regions between the at least one initial sorting region and at least two of the additional sorting regions, such that two items from different initial sorting regions are sorted into the same intermediary sorted set; and

sorting the items within each of the at least one intermediary sorted sets by moving at least some of the items to the return region in substantially the predetermined sorted sequence.

2.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the act of using a computer to track the location of each of the plurality of items.

3.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the items are sorted in a single pass.

4.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the act of conveying items from at least one of the return regions serially and in the predetermined sorted sequence.

5.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the act of placing an identifier with each of the plurality of items.

6.   (Original) The method of claim 5, further comprising the act of checking the identifier to ensure that the order of the items substantially matches the predetermined sorted sequence.

7.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the items are positioned linearly in the sorting regions.

8.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein a computer is used to control the movement and positioning of the items according to a predetermined algorithm.

9.   (Currently Amended) An apparatus for sorting a plurality of postal bins comprising:

      a plurality of sorting regions, wherein the plurality of sorting regions comprise for each sorting at least two initial regions in which postal bins are initially located in an unsorted order, and at least two additional sorting regions, at least one of the additional sorting regions functioning as a return region in which postal bins are located after completion of sorting and at least one additional region used in the sorting;

      a first mechanism for physically moving at least one postal bin between at least two selected sorting regions, where the first mechanism is configured to move two items initially located in different initial regions into the same additional region;

      a second mechanism for physically moving at least one postal bin between positions within each sorting region;

      a postal bin location tracking mechanism; and

      controls operative for controlling the first and second mechanisms to move the postal bins into a predetermined sorted sequence by sorting the postal bins in each of the at least two initial sorting regions into at least one intermediary sorted set, in which the postal bins are in a sorted order, by moving postal bins in at least one of the initial sorting regions between the at least one initial sorting region and at least two of the additional sorting regions, such that two postal bins from different initial sorting regions are sorted into the same intermediary sorted set, and sorting the postal bins within each of the at least one intermediary sorted sets by moving at least some of the postal bins to the return region in substantially the predetermined sorted sequence at least partly in response to the tracking mechanism.

10.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein at least some of the sorting regions are located one under another and wherein the first mechanism includes an elevator.

11.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the second mechanism is a conveyor.

12.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the controls include a processor running a subroutine for issuing instructions according to a selected item sorting algorithm.

13.   (Cancelled).

14.   (Cancelled).

15.   (Cancelled).